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ARM Facilities Newsletter

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Severe Weather Preparedness – StormReady



To help communities guard against the devastation that can result from severe weather, the National Weather Service (NWS) has developed a new program called StormReady. The aim is to build, at the community level, the communication and safety skills necessary to prevent loss of life and property in the event of severe weather. Each year weather-related disasters lead to 500 deaths and \$14 billion in damage. The NWS hopes that prepared communities implementing StormReady can reduce these numbers when local emergency managers have clear-cut guidelines for improving their hazardous weather operations.

As of May 2001, the NWS had certified 149 StormReady communities in 26 states. One of the newest StormReady communities is within the ARM SGP CART site: Butler County, Kansas, home to the Towanda extended facility and the Beaumont intermediate facility sites. Butler County received its StormReady certification on April 25, 2001.



Figure 1. A StormReady road sign. (NOAA)

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The StormReady program has the following criteria for certification:

- Establish a 24-hour warning point and emergency operations center.
- Have more than one way to receive severe weather warnings and forecasts and to alert the public.
- Create a system that monitors weather conditions locally.
- Promote public readiness through community seminars.
- Develop a formal hazardous weather plan that includes training for severe weather spotters and emergency exercises.

StormReady certification is determined by an advisory board composed of NWS warning coordination meteorologists and state and local emergency managers. The board reviews applications and visits municipalities to verify that certification criteria have been met. Each StormReady certification is valid for two years. Once a community is accredited, it receives road signs displaying its StormReady status. StormReady is a voluntary program in which no grant money is available, but StormReady communities are better prepared through planning, education, and awareness.

The NWS program SKYWARN, a network of NWS-trained, volunteer severe weather spotters, trains spotters for StormReady communities. SKYWARN members include private citizens, amateur radio operators, firefighters, law enforcement officials, and other government officials. Any adult who is interested in becoming a severe weather spotter may take a basic tornado and severe weather spotter class. The two-hour training is free and open to the public. Instruction is by an NWS meteorologist who teaches spotters what to look for when observing the sky for

signs of severe weather. Spotters learn about severe storm structures, how to identify clouds and other weather features indicating severe storms or tornadoes, and how to stay safe during severe weather spotting.

Volunteer spotters provide additional real-time severe weather information to local NWS offices. At times, this important information is not available from today's sophisticated weather radars. Integrating spotter reports with NWS weather technology gives communities a more complete picture of a threatening weather event. Spotters usually work from assigned locations around a community. Each spotter is in contact with local emergency management officials and reports weather conditions throughout a severe weather event. This information is relayed to the local NWS office. When weather spotters alert community officials and the NWS about severe weather, both the accuracy and timeliness of weather warnings improve. To get information on how to become a severe weather spotter in your area, contact your county emergency management official.

On the Internet

For more information on making your community StormReady, visit the NWS web site

<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/stormready/index.htm>